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SUBJECT: NATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL REGULATORY BODY SELECTIVELY ENFORCES THE LAW

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On March 14, the broadcasting licenses of three local community radio stations located in Dakar's suburbs were suspended for two months by the National Council for Broadcasting

Regulation (CNRA) for violating a law that prohibits these types of stations from covering political issues. While technically illegal, this type of activity is common. In this instance, these stations were broadcasting favorable coverage of the opposition and it appears the law was selectively applied. After much public outcry and agreeing to cease and desist to broadcast politically themed programs, the licenses were reinstated on March 19. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 14, CNRA suspended the broadcasting licenses of community radios "Oxy Jeunes" (based in the suburb of Pikine), "Afia FM" (based in the suburb of Grand Yoff), and "Djoloff FM" (based in the suburb of Linguere). Community radios in Senegal are non-profit entities and therefore do not pay taxes. For Senegalese, community radio stations are often a primary source of news and entertainment and any closure of these stations generally generate popular outcry.

True to form, residents of Pikine were in the process of organizing a march in protest against the closure of Oxy Jeunes when its license was reinstated on March 19 after all three stations promised to stop airing politically related broadcasts.

¶3. (SBU) Senegalese law forbids community radio stations from airing political programs, debates, or messages, nor can they run any advertisements (article 19). If the stations do not comply with these regulations, CNRA can impose sanctions, including withdrawing their broadcasting license. During a recent pre-electoral campaign tour throughout the country, CNRA held workshops reminding community radio stations of the potential sanctions for breaking the aforementioned laws. In response to these workshops, a number of stations did suspended their political reporting. In contrast, Commercial radio stations operate under a different code and have been extensively reporting on political issues. These stations, however, tend to practice a good deal of self-censorship.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: In the lead-up to the March 22 local elections, community radio stations throughout the country have been regularly violating regulations prohibiting them from covering political activity. What is of great interest and reflective of a growing trend to repress adverse media is the blatant manner in which GOS targeted stations that were airing reporting favorable to the opposition.

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